MUTED OPTIMISM FOR ECONOMY: SURVEY, PG6

Sports pg 7

Canada-U.S. to face off in world junior final

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Celebrity pg18

Elton lends Eminem a helping hand

Attendance at doomed Bloedel up threefold

CONSERVATORY Attendance at the Bloedel Conservatory has gone up threefold since the Vancouver Park Board announced the geodesic dome will close in April 2010 — proving the doomed venue should stay open, according to Terri Clark of Friends of the Bloedel.

More than 8,200 people visited the conservatory in December — up from around 2,500 the same time last year — generating $40,300, Clark said. Recent media attention and the proximity of the new Canada Line may be reasons for the increase in visitors.

The Park Board voted 4-3 in November to shut down the facility. **METRO VANCOUVER**

FRANK GUNN/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Pallbearers carry the flag-draped casket of Vancouver-born journalist Michelle Lang to the back of the waiting hearse during her repatriation ceremony in Trenton, Ont., yesterday. Lang and four Canadian soldiers were killed Wednesday when the armoured vehicle they were travelling in was struck by a massive roadside-bomb blast on the outskirts of Kandahar city.

Sombre homecoming

Families mourn journalist, soldiers killed in Afghanistan

Grieving loved ones, their wind-bitten faces taut with grief, placed single white roses atop Michelle Lang's flag-shrouded casket yesterday as the bodies of the award-winning Vancouver-born journalist and four Canadian soldiers were returned to Canadian soil.

To the now-familiar strains of a piper's lament, pallbearers carried the casket to one of a line of waiting hearses, where a large contingent of family members and friends, linked arm-in-arm, emerged from beneath a shelter to bid Lang, 34, a final farewell.

Michelle Lang

Michael Louie, the man Lang was to marry this summer, carried a single red rose and wept openly as he approached the vehicle, while others around him pulled each other close.

One by one, the ritual repeated for each of the men Lang died alongside — Sgt. George Miok, 28; Sgt. Kirk Taylor, 28; Cpl. Zachery McCormack, 21; and Pte. Garrett Chidley, 21 — during a bitterly cold repatriation ceremony at CFB Trenton, Ont., an hour's drive east of Toronto.

140 In all, 138 Canadian soldiers and two civilians have died as part of Canada's eight-year mission in Afghanistan.

Chidley was raised in Langley.

The five were killed Wednesday when the armoured vehicle they were travelling in was struck by a massive roadside-bomb blast on the outskirts of Kandahar city — the third-bloodiest day for Canadian forces since the Afghan mission began in 2002.

Along with the contingent of family members, Gov. Gen. Michaëlle Jean, Defence Minister Peter MacKay and Gen. Walt Natynczyk, Canada's chief of defence staff, were also on hand to pay their respects.

Lang, who was on assignment for the Calgary Herald, is the first Canadian journalist to be killed while covering the mission. A National Newspaper Award winner, she had been in Afghanistan for little more than two weeks. **THE CANADIAN PRESS**

Parking, cellphone regulations kick off

CHANGES New cellphone restrictions and parking regulations will greet Vancouver drivers as they return to work and school today.

In addition, the first Olympic road closure (not related to the Athletes' Village) was scheduled to take effect today on Abbott Street between Pacific and Expo boulevards.

The road closures will continue throughout January, with Quebec Street adjacent the Athletes' Village closing Jan. 15. Renfrew Street at the Pacific Coliseum and Waterfront and Canada Place roads will be closed near the end of the month.

The cellphone restrictions, which were introduced by the government last fall, restrict cellphone by motorists to hands-free devices.

The law took effect Jan. 1 but will be run as an education campaign for the first month. Beginning Feb. 1, drivers caught talking without hands-free will be subject to a $167 fine. Those caught emailing or texting could receive three points on their licence.

Vancouver's new parking regulations, which also began New Year's Day, will see new parking hours extended (9 a.m. to 10 p.m., seven days a week) at parking meters across the city.

New parking meter rates take effect in April and will see the highest rate in Downtown increased to $6 an hour.

JEFF HODSON/METRO VANCOUVER

News on the Move

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Local pg 2

Dog takes on cougar, wins

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Local

Sister act at Orpheum Theatre

Twin songstresses Tegan and Sara, left, will be in Vancouver tomorrow for the first of two back-to-back shows at the Orpheum Theatre promoting their latest album, Sainthood. The indie rockers will take to the stage at 7:30 p.m.

METRO VANCOUVER

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Case of missing Langley man now deemed homicide

KRISTEN THOMPSON
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CRIME The case of a Langley man who went missing two years ago on New Year's Day is now being investigated as a homicide, RCMP have announced.

Derek Kelly, 31, was last seen in the Bridge Lake area near 100 Mile House at a New Year's Eve party.

"We have ... identified several potential witnesses who have been approached by investigators, but for unknown reasons, have to date been reluctant to cooperate with police," said Cpl. Dan Moskaluk.

"It is ... disturbing to consider that there (are people) who could assist in this matter and to date decline to do so."

PHOTO COURTESY RCMP

Angel, a golden retriever, is covered with blood after surviving a cougar attack on Saturday.

Dog thwarts cougar

Retriever protects boy, 11, from charging cat

The way Lloyd Forman sees it, his 11-year-old grandson was saved by an Angel.

That's the golden retriever who protected young Austin from a charging cougar during a bloody, against-all-odds confrontation Saturday in Boston Bar, about 200 kilometres northeast of Vancouver.

"The cougar came (from) about five feet away and made a big jump (at Austin)," Forman said yesterday.

"The dog jumped in between and took on the cougar."

Austin was in his family's backyard collecting firewood with his dog when the cougar appeared.

The large cat charged toward the boy, but Angel stepped in and fought off the cougar while other family members called for help.

Forman, 72, was sitting down to a bowl of soup when the telephone rang. It was the boy's mother.

"They phoned here; the cougar was eating the dog alive, they figured. I said, 'Phone 911,'" Forman recalled. "Fortunately, he (the nearest RCMP officer) was a minute away."

When the officer arrived, the cougar had Angel under the porch with its teeth around the dog's neck. The Mountie fired several shots, killing the cougar.

The dog was injured, but is expected to recover. Austin was unhurt.

"He's doing pretty good — we're very fortunate, the dog's injured and that's it," said Forman. "It's a pretty traumatic experience."

Sgt. Peter Thiessen of the RCMP said there's no question Austin's encounter with the cougar would have been a lot worse had it not been for his dog.

"The boy was in severe risk," said Thiessen.

"That cougar was advancing aggressively to both of them, and the dog intervened and got between the animal and the young child and the risk was extremely high."

Thiessen said conservation officials will look into what happened and why the cougar came so close to people.

"We have seen cougar attacks in the lower part of British Columbia," he said. "It's not something that's common, but it is something that has occurred."

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Teen killed while 'playing chicken' on highway: RCMP

JEFF HODSON
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FATALITY A Vancouver Island teen was killed after being struck by a pickup truck as she and a friend allegedly played chicken with traffic on a highway near Nanaimo.

Cynthia Bernice Williams, 17, of Port Alberni was killed while attempting to cross Highway 19A at 7:30 p.m. on New Year's Day.

She was hit by a northbound Ford Ranger, driven by a couple returning to their home in Parksville, and was pronounced dead at the scene. The couple was not injured.

In a release, Nanaimo RCMP Const. Gary O'Brien said police received numerous 911 calls just prior to the accident, concerning a man and a woman who appeared to be "playing chicken with oncoming vehicles."

The accident, which closed the highway for several hours and backed traffic up for two kilometres, occurred within 20 metres of an overpass.

A 26-year-old man was arrested nearby. He is believed to have been with Williams at the time and was arrested for breaching a court order to have no contact with her.

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Stanley Park **Barely cold**

DARRYL DYCK/THE CANADIAN PRESS

A man wears shorts as he jogs through Stanley Park during mild weather in Vancouver yesterday. According to Environment Canada, the temperature reached 9 C.

Recycle your Christmas tree at a fundraiser this weekend

KRISTEN THOMPSON
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COMPOST The Lions Club and City of Vancouver are hoping to make the daunting task of dismantling your Christmas tree a little easier with a series of tree-chipping fundraising events around town.

Residents — or fans of destruction — are invited to bring their trees to one of four locations on Jan. 9 and 10, where volunteers will shove the Christmas conifers tip-first into wood chippers.

Participants are being asked to bring cash donations or non-perishable food, and should be sure to have removed all decorations and tinsel since the remains of the trees are being composted.

Recycling stations will be set up at parking lots at Kerrisdale Community Ice Rink, Kits Beach, Sunset Beach and Trout Lake Community Centre from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

More than 4,000 live cut trees were chipped and composted at the Vancouver Landfill at last year's tree-recycling events.

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WHAT'S ONLINE TODAY

Job Search using Metro's Workopolis search at **metronews.ca/workopolis**
Play online games at **metronews.ca/play**
Blogs Global Peasant gives a slight twist to a classic recipe for chicken pot pie
Immigration Guidy Mamann on restrictions against refugees claiming work experience to apply for residence at **metronews.ca/immigration**

Lotteries

Friday, Jan. 1
Lotto Max: 7, 9, 13, 18, 27, 33, & 44 Bonus 15
Extra: 53, 61, 86, 89
Saturday, Jan. 2
Lotto 6/49: 16, 22, 25, 33, 39 & 48 Bonus 28
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Extra: 23, 28, 30, 43
These results are not official.

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News in brief

MISSING Three Surrey men have been reported missing in unrelated cases since New Year's Eve, RCMP say. Officers are looking for Mark McGrath, last seen on Dec. 31. He's considered as being at risk of harming himself. On Jan. 1, at about 7 p.m., William Peter went missing after a trip to a store. Jae Hyung Kim went missing the same day from Newton.

RESOLUTION HandyDART will return to full service Jan. 11 after the union and management resolved their labour dispute. Mediators Mark Brown and Vince Ready helped forge the new labour contract from the previous seven different agreements.

SAVED A 24-year-old man was rushed to hospital Saturday afternoon after a police officer pulled him out of the Coquitlam River. The man had either fallen or jumped off the Patricia Avenue Footbridge and was plucked from the icy waters downstream.

FIRE Three people have died in an apartment fire in Port Hardy that broke out Jan. 1. One woman was able to get out in time. The cause of the fire hasn't been determined.

BABY One of Chilliwack's newest residents already has a claim to fame — he was the first baby born in the Lower Mainland in 2010. James Bayes, born to Laura and Aaron Bayes, was welcomed into the world at 12:46 a.m. on Jan. 1 — a month premature.

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Ottawa transit project could get pricey, expert claims
The price tag for Ottawa's proposed downtown light-rail tunnel could balloon because of engineering complications, says a local transit advocate, CBC News Online reports. City councillors voted last month to approve a $2.1-billion, 12.5-kilometre stretch of light rail track. METRO NEWS SERVICES

Canada

Widow wants 'the truth'

The widow of one of the men killed in the worst construction accident in the last half century has called for a full public inquiry into the Christmas Eve deaths of four workers who fell 13 storeys from a scaffold in Toronto. "I want the truth," Oksana Afanasenko, left, told the Toronto Star in an interview through a Russian-language translator yesterday.
TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Airport restrictions expected to continue

Don't expect tighter security at Canadian airports to relax until the United States gets over its latest air scare, aviation experts say.

The ban on certain types of carry-on luggage on U.S.-bound flights, along with other restrictions, are likely to last as long as the Americans want them to.

"Canada is very much a victim of the United States," said David Gillen, director of the University of British Columbia's Centre for Transportation Studies. "They're the ones who (are) driving the entire process."

Enhanced security measures have been in place since an apparent terror attack was thwarted on Christmas Day.

Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, a 23-year-old Nigerian man, was arrested after he allegedly tried to bring down the Northwest Airlines flight from Amsterdam to Detroit.

The incident prompted authorities to at least temporarily ban carry-on bags on flights into the U.S., though items such as small purses, coats, laptops and medication or medical devices are allowed.

Transport Canada says the restrictions will continue until further notice.
THE CANADIAN PRESS

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS/INTELCENTER

This image taken from a website frequently used by militants to disseminate their messages, purports to show Nigerian Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab. In a statement posted on the website dated Saturday, Dec. 26, al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula has claimed responsibility for the attack on a U.S. airliner bound for Detroit on Christmas Day.

Small business loan program failing: Report

BUSINESS An Industry Canada loan program for small business continues to lose money and annoy bankers a decade after it was redesigned to avoid those very problems.

A new report on the Canada Small Business Financing Program has found a loan-guarantee portfolio in sharp decline even as losses to the federal treasury mount.

The program, which reimburses financial institutions for losses on defaulted loans, is a tangle of red tape and inflexible terms that has lenders fleeing, says the KPMG study, commissioned by Industry Canada.

"Lenders have identified a heavy administrative burden, which includes a paper-based system, and difficulties with the claim process, as major obstacles," the consultants' report concludes. "It is not profitable to them."

The result has been a sharp drop in the number of loans, hitting a new low of 9,000 — about half the number the program supported in 1999 when it was overhauled to put it on a more business-like footing.

The program has so far guaranteed about $10 billion in small-business loans issued by banks, credit unions and others since 1999, and collects fees based on the size of the loan.

The revenue paid to Industry Canada was supposed to cover the default claims paid out, but the math has never worked in Ottawa's favour.
THE CANADIAN PRESS

Campbell plans to seek fourth term

POLITICS B.C. Premier Gordon Campbell is sending strong signals the Winter Olympics are giving him a second political wind, dashing widespread speculation the three-term leader was considering retiring after the Games.

Campbell

Campbell says his job is only half finished and he's planning to run for a fourth term in 2013.
THE CANADIAN PRESS

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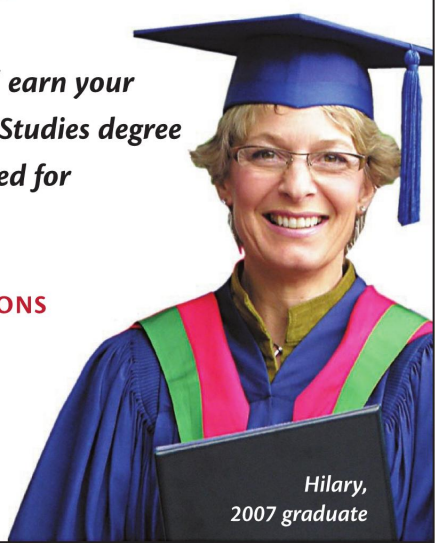
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Picassos among stolen art
About 30 works of art, including paintings by Pablo Picasso and Henri Rousseau, have been stolen from the home of a private collector in southern France, police said Saturday. The value of the stolen art is still unclear. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

World

Man accused of killing relatives found

A man accused of killing four relatives at a Thanksgiving holiday dinner was captured at a motel in the Florida Keys where police said he had eluded authorities for about a month by checking in under a fake name and address, and hiding his car with a cover. Paul Merhige, 35, pictured, was arrested without a struggle Saturday night after the TV show America's Most Wanted aired and provided the tip that led to Merhige's capture.
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

News figures seeking sums

Policies forbidding payment for news interviews are being increasingly blurred by U.S. television networks vying for access to accidental celebrities and photos.

Three of the past month's accidental celebrities — Jasper Schuringa, the Dutch tourist who helped thwart an attack on a Detroit-bound plane; David Goldman, who took a custody fight for his son to Brazil; and the White House party-crashing Salahis — have either sought or received goodies from TV networks eager to hear their stories.

Schuringa gave interviews to outlets that had agreed to purchase blurry cellphone images he'd taken of a man who authorities say tried to use explosives to take down the plane. Goldman and his son accepted NBC's offer of a ride home from Brazil on a charter airplane.

Representatives for Michaele and Tareq Salahi, who embarrassed the Obama administration by sneaking into a state dinner, were reportedly seeking six-figure bids from networks to tell their story.

"I don't know if people would have thought of that in the past," said Andy Schotz, head of the ethics committee for the Society of Professional Journalists. "But now often the first thing people think of is to get a publicist, a lawyer and an agent and figure out how to make money" from that newfound notoriety, he said.

The society condemned NBC for "checkbook journalism" with the Goldman trip. NBC said it had already chartered a plane to bring its personnel back from Brazil.

But NBC took multiple pictures and interviewed Goldman on the plane before his exclusive interview for the news show Today.

And the network seems immune to the industry's financial woes: A chartered jet from Brazil to New York would cost about $90,000.
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Distorting the news

- Policies against paying for interviews are in place to avoid distorting the news. The concern is that news subjects will change their stories to make them more valuable or please those who paid them. Evasion efforts seem centred primarily on ultra-competitive morning news shows and prime-time magazines. These outlets now fight for stories that might have been considered tabloid fodder years ago, often against websites or other outlets that won't hesitate to pay for an interview or information.

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A new report suggests the U.K. culture of heavy drinking is putting strain on the country's health-care system. Scan this barcode for the full story.

India Shelter from the storm

CHANNI ANAND/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Labourers wrapped in woolens take shelter from rain in a cold and foggy morning in Jammu, India yesterday. More than 30 people have died in cold weather-related incidents in northern India in the past 24 hours, including 10 people killed in train accidents caused by dense fog.

U.S., Britain lock up Yemen embassies over terror threats

SAN'A The U.S. and Britain locked up their embassies in Yemen yesterday after threats from al-Qaida, and the White House expressed alarm at the terror group's expanded reach in the nation, where an offshoot apparently ordered the Christmas Day plot against a U.S. airliner.

U.S. President Barack Obama's top counterterrorism adviser, John Brennan, cited "indications al-Qaida is planning to carry out an attack against a target" in the capital, possibly the embassy, and estimated the group had several hundred members in Yemen. Security reasons led Britain to act, too; it was not known when the embassies would reopen.

The U.S. is worried about terrorism in Yemen, a U.S. ally and aid recipient, Brennan said, but doesn't consider the country a second front with Afghanistan and Pakistan in the fight against terrorism. As to whether U.S. troops might be sent to Yemen, Brennan replied: "We're not talking about that at this point at all."

Britain and the U.S. are assisting a counterterrorism police unit in Yemen as fears grow about the increasing threat of terrorism originating from the country. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Flight checks

- The Transportation Security Administration says passengers flying into the U.S. from states that "sponsor terrorism" — Cuba, Iran, Sudan and Syria — as well as Yemen. Nigeria and Pakistan will be subject to enhanced screening techniques, such as scans and pat-downs, starting today.

News in brief

NEWARK Authorities searched for a man who walked through a screening checkpoint exit into the secure side of a terminal at Newark Liberty International Airport. A Homeland Security spokeswoman said a man was seen walking down an exit lane about 5:30 p.m. yesterday. Screening was halted in the terminal while officials reviewed surveillance tapes.
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Chinese workers combating fuel spill in river

POLLUTION Workers in northern China dug diversion channels and used floating dams and solidifying agents to try to stop a diesel fuel leak that has polluted a large stretch of one waterway from flowing into the Yellow River, a water source for millions of Chinese.

More than 700 workers worked overnight into yesterday morning to contain a spill that leaked from a pipe into the Wei River in Shaanxi province following a construction accident Wednesday.

Vice-Premier Li Keqiang ordered local officials to "strictly prevent leakage and pollution from flowing into the Yellow River and ensure the safety of drinking water for the masses," according to a Shaanxi provincial government news release yesterday.
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Yellow River

- The Wei is a major tributary of the Yellow River, China's second-longest, whose water quality has deteriorated rapidly.

U.K. officials knew air attack suspect had ties to extremists

INTELLIGENCE British officials knew that the Nigerian man suspected of trying to bomb a Detroit-bound airliner had ties to U.K. extremists but did not consider him enough of a high risk to alert American authorities, a senior British official said yesterday.

Officials realized a year after Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab came to London to study in 2005 that he was in contact with Islamic extremists who were being monitored, a government official told The Associated Press yesterday. But there were no signs that Abdulmutallab wanted to target the U.S. or was considering turning toward violence, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Comment

High-speed rail vision too narrow

It's time for Canada to wake up to the reality of high-speed rail. While federal politicians pay limited lip service to the idea of connecting our urban regions with this sustainable and efficient mode of transport, other countries are forging ahead with more concrete plans.

Last week, U.K. Transport Secretary Andrew Adonis declared to the BBC that 2010 would be the year of the bullet train.

"I want Britain to be a pioneer in low-cost, mass-market high-speed rail," he said, noting the lines could be developed through public-private partnerships.

South of the border, U.S. President Barack Obama has made huge strides toward high-speed rail projects across the U.S., setting aside at least $8 billion for such projects.

Wouldn't you know it, at least one of those projects could have a big impact in British Columbia. The so-called Cascadia Line, connecting Portland and Seattle, could ultimately extend northward to Vancouver.

But you wouldn't know it by listening to our federal politicians. Both Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Opposition Leader Michael Ignatieff have paid minimal attention to this potentially transformational development.

Ignatieff, of course, has been happy to talk about his goal of high-speed rail for the Windsor to Quebec City corridor. But his vision has yet to reach B.C.

What a missed political opportunity for the Liberal party leader.

More importantly, what an overlooked economic occasion for this province. Observers have already noted that Obama's high-speed rail plans for America could eventually rival his country's highway building program of a half-century ago.

It would be a shame if political neglect were to leave Metro Vancouver out of this golden transportation opportunity.

*****

North Vancouver Mayor Darrell Mussatto should be commended for bravely pursuing a bike lift for his city's cycling constituents. The technology is now being studied by his staff, and given predictable criticism from political opponents, it's impressive the project has come this far.

The idea of a quirky bike escalator in the dense but hilly Lonsdale corridor makes good sense, and shows a real commitment to promoting cycling not just to spandex-clad road racers, but to all bike commuters.

Not to be outdone is New Westminster, which last month launched a bike lift feasibility study of its own. It's part of the city's Downtown Community Plan, which is ushering in a new era of smart transportation and urban planning for the former provincial capital.

Derek Moscato is a writer with a focus on urban issues, transportation, architecture and economics; dmoscato@yahoo.com.

Views

Ways to make any day seem brighter

Jan. 4. The holidays are over and today we go back to work or school or to wishing we had work or school. February (proof that God hates us) is just 27 cold, bleak days away. And, in the past few weeks, many of us have answered the question, "Is it possible to eat too many Christmas cookies?"

But, I ask you, is all of this any reason to be feeling down? The answer: Of course it is.

Help is at hand. Here's a list of five ways to make any day seem brighter.

1 Make a list of things you DON'T have to do today. This might include:

Today, I don't have to enter a witness protection program.

Today, I don't have to be Tiger Woods' public relations adviser.

2 Limit your bad new intake.

Studies show that the less bad news we hear, the happier we are. As a general rule, the only bad news we really need to hear is limited to:

The building you are in is on fire.

Bad news we don't need to hear includes:

The fact that chocolate comes from beans doesn't make it a health food.

Any news items containing the words "dust mite."

3 Hit the drugstore and make note of the products you don't need ... at least at the moment. For instance, I myself was darn glad to realize that I don't currently need hemorrhoid medication, head bandages or foot fungus cream.

Tips: Don't spend time in the "family planning" section thinking, "Well, I certainly don't need condoms or strawberry scented lubricant gel," as this can have the opposite effect to making you feel better.

And if you find that realizing you don't need Metamusil still doesn't cheer you up, it is permissible to stand in the aisle and wait until someone comes along who does.

4 Buy one of my books. This is 100 per cent guaranteed to create happiness.

If only for me.

5 Make a list of the ways in which your life is better than Halle Berry's. For many of us, this may be a short list. And limited to, "I don't have to choose yet another fabulous dress to wear to yet another fabulous event."

Male readers may want to imagine themselves as George Clooney rather than Halle Berry. Or not. This is all about what makes you happy after all.

Have a great day!

Anne Hines is an author and humour writer. She has written three novels and one collection of nonfiction humour.

MICHAEL DE ADDER

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RIM's Balsillie named Business Newsmaker of the Year

Research In Motion CEO Jim Balsillie was named Canada's 2009 Business Newsmaker of the Year, as chosen in a survey of editors and broadcasters by The Canadian Press. Balsillie made many headlines last year for his tenacious, yet failed attempt to land the Phoenix Coyotes. METRO NEWS SERVICES

Business

DOLLAR	N.GAS	OIL	TSX
US $95.15¢ (Thursday's close)	US $5.527 (Thursday's close)	US $79.36 (Thursday's close)	11,746.11 (Thursday's close)

EDITOR: FERMIN.DESOUZA@METRONEWS.CA

'Cautious optimism'

Canadians have hope for economy in 2010: Survey

Uneasy, recession-weary Canadians are divided on the future of the country's economy but seem to hold much more hope for the year ahead, new research from the Royal Bank of Canada suggests.

According to the data, 60 per cent of people across Canada think the national economy will improve over the next year, after a relatively grim 2009 spent in a recessionary hangover from the global financial turmoil of 2008.

The results of the national survey, which queried Canadians on a number of issues, including how they felt about their job security, elicited a feeling of muted cheer from Craig Wright, RBC's senior VP and chief economist.

60% 60 per cent of people in Canada think the national economy will improve over the next year, according to research from the Royal Bank of Canada.

"We're viewing it with cautious optimism," Wright said.

"Cautious, given the current environment and the heightened uncertainty. But optimism, in that things are expected to get better as we move through the year."

The key indicator for Wright was responses to questions about job anxiety, about the fear they or someone they love is teetering on the brink of job loss.

The RBC data shows that 21 per cent of Canadians, roughly one in five, are worried that somebody in their immediate household is in danger of losing his or her job.

That number is down from 27 per cent in December from the previous month — a sign that, gradually, the number of people who feel endangered by layoffs is going down, as the economy begins to grow again.

"We saw an improvement, a reduced anxiety about job losses," Wright said. "And that's a good news story. Because when consumers have jobs, they have incomes and confidence to spend."

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Business in brief

GAS A natural gas project set for production this year could breathe new life into Nova Scotia's sluggish offshore sector, but it won't resuscitate the province's economy overnight after drowning in red ink, say analysts and industry experts. Calgary-based EnCana's long-awaited Deep Panuke field is on track to produce natural gas for major U.S. markets late this year after the company decided in 2007 to proceed with the project.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

U.S. consul general eyeing oilsands

ALBERTA A career diplomat is keeping a close eye on the failures and successes within Alberta's oilsands and is reporting what she learns to the administration of U.S. President Barack Obama.

Laura Lochman, the U.S. consul general responsible for Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and the Northwest Territories, has essentially become the eyes and ears for the White House since her appointment in Calgary last June.

"Our job in the consulate is to communicate back to Washington, back to the policy-makers, what's really going on here. Because policy, at least theoretically, should be based on fact and reality," Lochman told The Canadian Press.

Alberta boasts the second largest oil reserves in the world — more than 174 billion barrels — behind only Saudi Arabia.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Dubai World's tallest building

KAMRAN JEBREILI/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Dubai is set to open the world's tallest building amid tight security today, celebrating the tower as a bold feat on the world stage despite the city-state's shaky financial footing. Burj Dubai is more than 800 metres tall and has more than 160 storeys, the most of any building in the world.

Aerospace industry hopes for rebound

AIRLINES When the Boeing Dreamliner 787 took to the skies for its first test flight in mid-December, it carried the hopes of the aerospace industry with it.

Boeing is betting that this smaller, fuel-efficient jet will spur demand from airlines, which will use it to fly routes all year-round that would otherwise be too expensive.

Last year was a difficult one for Canada's aerospace industry.

After enjoying an unprecedented boom from 2006 to 2008, the industry was hit by sinking demand for business jets, a higher Canadian dollar and airlines delaying delivery of new aircraft.

"From the manufacturing perspective, clearly the recession means hard times are being had," said David Stewart, partner with AeroStrategy consulting. "In 2009, orders absolutely tanked."

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

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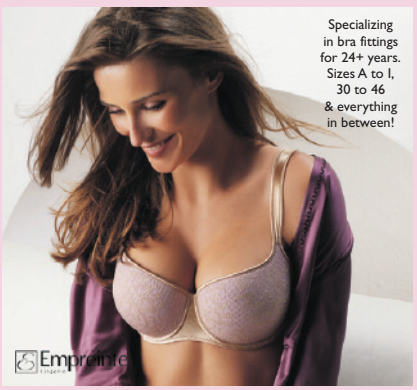

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Titans' Johnson makes history 7

Tennessee Titan Chris Johnson became the sixth player in NFL history to rush for 2,000 yards in a season yesterday in a 17-13 victory over the Seattle Seahawks. METRO NEWS SERVICES

Sports

EDITOR: DON.MCHOULL@METRONEWS.CA

GEOFF HOWE/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Team Canada's Marco Scandella, left, is congratulated on his goal by teammate Travis Hamonic during semifinal world junior action versus Team Switzerland in Saskatoon yesterday.

Going for gold

WORLD JUNIORS

Canada 6 Switzerland 1

Taylor Hall and his Canadian teammates are one win away from making hockey history.

Hall scored two goals as Canada beat Switzerland 6-1 yesterday in semifinal action at the world junior hockey championship, giving the Canadians a chance at a record sixth straight gold medal.

"It's very special," the gifted left-winger said. "When you're put in that position, you do everything you can to achieve it.

"This is the opportunity of a lifetime for us, just to get to the final. To win that sixth goal medal would be unbelievable."

Defenceman Marco Scandella's short-handed goal in the second period proved to be the game-winner as Canada reached the final for a ninth year in a row.

They will face the United States in the final tomorrow after the Americans downed Sweden 5-2 in the other semifinal. Canada beat the U.S. 5-4 in a shootout in round-robin play.

"It's one thing to go to the world juniors, but another to be competing for a gold or silver medal," added Hall, a favourite to go first overall in the NHL draft who hasn't hurt his prospects with five goals in as many games at the world juniors. "Everyone's jacked up about it and hopefully everyone brings their A-game."

Switzerland, which pulled out a stunning 3-2 overtime win in the quarter-finals over Russia on Saturday night, will play for the bronze medal.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

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Cowboys win their division, Steelers miss the playoffs

NFL Dallas won a division title, Baltimore earned a wild-card spot, the Super Bowl champs headed home and the NFL's last playoff berth went down to the final game.

Next week's first round will include three rematches of games played yesterday. The playoffs won't include the defending champion Pittsburgh Steelers.

Tony Romo and the Cowboys romped over Philadelphia 24-0 to win the NFC East, while the Ravens grabbed one AFC wild-card spot when they beat Oakland 21-13. The New York Jets then earned the other wild-card spot with a 37-0 win over the Cincinnati Bengals in the late game. The Jets will play at Cincinnati in the first round.

The Cardinals will host the Packers next Sunday after Green Bay beat them 33-7 yesterday. Baltimore will be at New England on Sunday to face the Patriots, who lost to the Texans 34-27. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SCOREBOARD

NHL

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Ottawa 7 Philadelphia 4
Buffalo 1 Montreal 0
Chicago 5 Anaheim 2
Florida 6 Pittsburgh 2

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NFL

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Ben Rycroft

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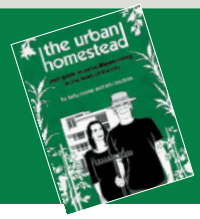
Computers still active in sleep mode

Did you know the energy savings from turning your computer off when not in use could pay for your next computer system, in full? It may surprise you as well, but screen savers do not save energy and many computers still consume more than 15 watts in sleep mode. Turn it off and start saving. METRO NEWS SERVICES

Going Green



Urban farming

The Urban Homestead: Your Guide to Self-Sufficient Living in the Heart of the City ($12), is a hands-on guide to help you harvest your own vegetables, raise city chickens and convert your home to solar energy. METRO NEWS SERVICES

EDITOR: BEN.RYCROFT@METRONEWS.CA

Green Tips in brief

LIGHTERS More than 1.5 billion disposable lighters end up in landfills every year. They carry an ugly environmental legacy — the casings are made of petroleum-based plastic, and the butane fuel is a petroleum product. Use cardboard matches instead. They are made from recycled paper and decompose better.

COMPUTERS More than three-quarters of computers sold in the Canada each year end up in a dump. That's why computers and other electronic waste make up 70 per cent of the lead, cadmium, and mercury in landfills. Instead of pitching it, recycle it. Give it to the non-profit iRecycle Computers.

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Cap consumption competition

Environmental sustainability at odds with Christmas gift giving

Eco-Minded
Kai Chan

metronews.ca/ecominded

Holidays can bring the promise of over-consumption as gifts become the focal point.

The holidays are the face-off of the sustainability game. They're the moment when the whole game seems to hang in the balance of a single set of actions.

That's because the challenge of environmental sustainability is for us to learn joy with modest consumption. And the holidays are pregnant with the promise of joy and the products of consumption. On average, Canadians spent many hundreds of dollars on gifts — even in recessions — and then Boxing week, we splurged on ourselves.

We consume in such quantities because we think it'll make us happy. And yet, all kinds of evidence flies in the face of that belief: statistics shows that above a modest minimum, even large increases in consumption add little to our happiness. My own observations suggest that families who celebrate with copious and conspicuous consumption are no happier. My own family struggles with this consumption dilemma, too. If gifts are assumed to demonstrate our love for each other, the giving escalates and we end up with much more than we need. We set guidelines and expectations (little is needed) to cap the competition, and it works well: Although we're a much bigger family now (six kids under 10), we give less in total than we used to — and we're certainly no less happy.

As a kid, I was gaga over gifts — giving and getting. I'd go to sleep contentedly sated with love and stuff. Although I didn't know it then, the golden moments of those memories are the people ones. I could have had much less, I think. I'm hoping that with our hard work to make holidays happy and modest, our daughter won't be as slow as me to discover that it's the love that makes memories, not the stuff.

Kai Chan is an assistant professor and Canada Research Chair at the Institute for Resources, Environment, and Sustainability (IRES) at UBC; vancouverletters@metronews.ca.

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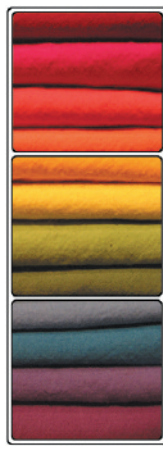
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Room for tradition
Byrne Luft of Manpower sees a future for paper resumés, though. "You still have a group of people who still like to have that piece of paper in front of them." METRO NEWS SERVICES

Workology

Hiring on the rise?

Twenty per cent of employers plan to increase their number of full-time, permanent employees in 2010, up from 14 per cent in 2009, according to a CareerBuilder study. Eleven per cent of employers say they plan to add part-time employees in 2010, up slightly from 9 per cent in 2009.

METRO NEWS SERVICES

EDITOR: DOUGLAS.DUNLOP@METRONEWS.CA

Could video resumés be the future?

JON TATTRIE
AND BRIAN COULTON
for Metro Canada

In some industries — broadcasting especially — the days of the paper resumé may be coming to an end, some experts say.

The paper resumé may be becoming as dated as the cigarettes and sexism of Mad Men, with websites, blogs and video resumes taking the future of recruiting online.

When Much Music wanted a new VJ, it opened the VJ 2.0 contest to anyone who could wow them with a video resumé. When The Score wanted a new on-air personality, it launched Drafted, a multimedia online contest for the coveted spot.

Derek Snider, host and manager of new media for The Score, says the web has radically changed the way people recruit.

"Broadcasting used to be one of those fields where it wasn't necessarily what you knew, but who you knew," he says, adding that hiring a decade ago would have meant asking around the office. "We wanted to cast a really wide net (with Drafted)."

That web caught 3,000 applicants as the online process opened the door to top talent across the country. Web presence counted heavily and the serious contenders had Twitter-sized bios and video resumés.

"Some were … basically broadcast quality, and that really gave them an edge over some of the other applicants. There were also some videos that were really intriguing, but weren't high-end," Snider says. "We're not (just) looking for a broadcaster, we're looking for somebody who's really comfortable and confident in who they are, and that comes across on camera."

The old ink-on-dead-tree approach just doesn't cut it anymore. "When it comes to broadcasting, it may well be the end of the paper resumé. Video and people that have their own websites and blogs would certainly show us their abilities," he says. "It really shows you what they're capable of, outside of standing in front of a camera and saying the Leafs beat the Canadiens 4-3 last night."

Byrne Luft is vice-president of marketing for Manpower Canada, which just launched Jobs2Web, a tool that allows companies to boost their search-engine presence for job postings.

"When a person is looking for a particular job, our clients' jobs will show up on the first page of any Google, Yahoo, Bing or MSN organic search," Luft explains.

They also broadcast jobs on social media like Twitter and Facebook, which gets them in the minds of people not actively looking for work, but who might be lured into a new position.

Video resumés highlight the applicant's "soft skill abilities" in a more time-efficient way than initial sit-down interviews, he says. It also means a boss can easily forward the link to colleagues who may have a more suitable position.

But there's a huge risk if you don't monitor your online presence and your potential boss comes across photos and blogs that throw an unflattering light on you.

"When candidates come to Manpower, we coach them … to market their personal brand most effectively," Luft says. "If you don't do it in an effective way, it can actually hinder your ability to find employment."

Employers expect uptick in hiring for 2010 year

2010 The encouraging news regarding the economy may be easing hiring fears, as employers signal an increase in their plans to hire in the new year, according to CareerBuilder's 2010 Job Forecast. CareerBuilder surveyed more than 2,700 hiring managers and human resource professionals nationwide across industries.

"Although 20 per cent of employers plan to add headcount in 2010, up from 14 per cent last year, they still remain cautious in regards to their hiring. We're headed in the right direction but should not expect to see actual job growth until at least Q2 2010," said Matt Ferguson, CEO of CareerBuilder.

Even as companies continue to watch their spending, they still plan slight increases to salaries in the coming year. Fifty-seven per cent of employers report their companies will increase salaries for existing employees in 2010.

Thirty-six per cent expect to raise salaries of existing employees by three per cent or more, while 11 per cent anticipate increases of five per cent or more. METRO NEWS SERVICES

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Campus theft happens every day so remember when you head back to school keep both eyes (and preferably both hands) on you laptop, wallet and cellphone whenever you're in a public place (such as the school library or student centre). METRO NEWS SERVICES

Finding your perfect image

OddJobs

As the new year approaches, everyone's thinking about change. Maybe it's time for a new look, a new image? For Deborah Reynolds, 49, every day at work is about changing how people look and feel.

But her career started in a workplace where how you looked was not so important. After graduating with a degree in criminology and political science, the Vancouver resident was recruited by Corrections Canada for a job at a federal penitentiary.

Layoffs three years later led her to become an immigration investigator, where she got the chance to travel and help find and arrest major criminals.

But losing her old job "made me realize no job is secure." Encouraged by her father, she decided to start up a business on the side for extra income, and to fall back on if she ever got laid off again.

Her current job satisfied her love of working with people, but it wasn't creative. In her teens she'd loved to paint and draw and experiment with makeup.

So Reynolds took a diploma in makeup artistry on evenings and weekends.

After she graduated in the spring of 1990, she began doing makeup for weddings.

But the makeup didn't always make her clients feel beautiful, not matter how great they looked. "It's not just a surface thing, you literally had to shift how they thought about themselves and transform them."

So Reynolds kept learning: She took courses in advanced makeup, colour analysis and image and read widely on everything from fashion to self-esteem.

In 1996, she quit her job and incorporated her business.

"There came a point where I couldn't do the work anymore. My mind was on my business."

DEBORAH REYNOLDS

As part of her initial consultation, Reynolds has image makeover clients fill out an exhaustive series of questions about their values and goals. Then, she spends two full days with them, getting them a new haircut, more stylish glasses, new makeup and new clothes.

But Reynolds also spends time talking to her clients about their internal side and helps them with leadership, time management, networking skills and self image.

Her clients include men and women climbing the corporate ladder who feel their look doesn't reflect their work goals and divorcées wanting to start dating again.

She recently helped a single mom who was off work with depression.

When Reynolds is not working with clients, she's marketing her business by attending events, making calls, doing online networking, and writing — she pens articles and is working on a book.

As for her own image? She used to wear long, artificial nails. Now, she keeps her nails trimmed with no polish, wears comfortable but current clothes and light makeup. "My look is very simple and clean and polished."

The Lowdown

Job title: Image consultant
Education/training: Training or knowledge in makeup, fashion and various facets of self improvement
Best Part of the Job: "Knowing you can have an impact on people's lives."
Worst Part of the Job: "Keeping up on all the marketing."

Diane Peters once hawked magic pens at the Canadian National Exhibition. She's now a writer and part-time journalism instructor.

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Back Row (l-r): Andrew Lawrence, Duglas Cruz, Susan Cumberland. Middle Row (l-r) Melanie Burke, Kerry Chin, Eric Wang. Front Row (l-r) Tara Blokzyl, Sharon Gordon. Missing: Chris Begg. Photo credit: ishoot.ca

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Green jobs, another trend for 2010
Employers will continue to turn some of their focus to the environment in the new year, according to CareerBuilder. Eleven per cent of employers say they plan to add "green jobs" in 2010. Green jobs are positions that implement environmentally conscious design, policy and technology. METRO NEWS SERVICES

Job trends for the new year

Some companies plan to look toward the future and make up for lost ground caused by the recession. Here are some of the employment trends for 2010:

One main trend for the coming year will be for companies to strengthen their brand through social media.

Replacing Lower-Performing Employees
Employers are taking advantage of the large number of top talent in the current labor pool to strengthen their work force. Thirty-seven per cent of employers say they plan to replace lower-performing employees with higher-performers.

Emphasis on Social Media to Strengthen Brand
The economy required companies to make some tough decisions about their businesses, which had a negative impact on their brands. Close to four-in-10 employers plan to put a greater emphasis on social media in 2010 to create a more positive brand for their organization. One-in-five employers plan to add social media responsibilities to a current employee, while close to one-in-12 plan to hire someone new.

Rehiring Laid-off Workers
Companies needed to scale their businesses to market last year and four-in-10 employers say they were forced to lay off workers. Among those who had lay-offs in 2009, 32 per cent of employers say they plan to bring back workers with three-in-10 either doing it now or plan to do so in the first six months of 2010.

Rehiring Retirees and Postponing Retirement
Companies understand the intellectual capital mature workers bring to their organization and 27 per cent say they are open to retaining their workers who are approaching retirement. Sixteen per cent say they are likely to rehire retirees from other companies in 2010. Additionally, one-in-10 are likely to provide incentives for workers at or approaching retirement age to stay on with the company longer.

Flexible Work Arrangements
Companies plan to continue providing employees with greater flexibility in hopes of maintaining a better work-life balance. Thirty-five per cent of employers say they plan to provide more flexible work arrangements in 2010, compared to 31 per cent last year. These arrangements include:

- Alternate schedules
- Telecommuting options
- Compressed workweeks
- Summer hours
- Job sharing
- Sabbaticals
- Cutting Benefits

Even as companies look to the new year and toward growth opportunities for their businesses, many are still choosing to trim perks and benefits.

Freelance or Contract Hiring
While employers still plan to be cautious regarding the number of full-time employees they add in the new year, many will turn to freelance or contract employees to help keep their businesses moving forward. Three-in-10 employers anticipate hiring freelancers or contractors in 2010, up from 28 per cent in 2009.

Bilingual Recruitment
Employers have identified having a diverse work force as an important measure of success as they begin to rebuild their businesses after the economic downturn. One area they plan to focus on is building a bilingual team. Nearly four-in-ten employers said they plan to hire bilingual candidates in 2010.

Business Travel
While employers are inching away from cost containment and more into growth, one area they still plan to save money on is business travel. Forty-three per cent of employers say that in their organizations there will be less business travel in 2010 than in 2009.

METRO NEWS SERVICES

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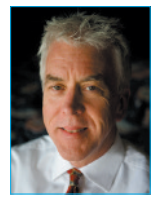

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We are committed to diversity as an equal opportunity employer.
THE HOME DEPOT
A: The one on the right.

Barkley, Weaver to host SNL

Charles Barkley and Sigourney Weaver will host the first two new episodes of Saturday Night Live in 2010. The basketball legend will guest on the Jan. 9 show. On Jan. 16, Weaver, currently appearing in Avatar, will host. EW.COM

Entertainment

Grunge reunion

Former Soundgarden frontman Chris Cornell confirmed via Twitter that the band is getting back together. "The 12 year break is over & school is back in session," Cornell tweeted. EW.COM

EDITOR: DEAN.LISK@METRONEWS.CA

Feel good about getting naked

IAN JOHNSTON
for Metro Canada

To be honest, the series How To Look Good Naked Canada could just as easily be called How To Feel Good Naked Canada.

"The show goes beyond a new haircut or attractive clothes," says Zain Meghji, the ever-present, enthusiastic host of the new W makeover series.

"Granted, it's a TV show. But for the women, it's like going through a personal development course all in one week. There's a psychological aspect to it. And I'm their guide on their journey to rediscover themselves."

Based on the smash hit British version, How To Look Good Naked Canada does in fact deliver on its naughty title — with participating women beginning each episode in their underwear before a full length mirror. What then ensues are some of the usual makeover segments and beauty tips, all culminating in a nude photo shoot.

"Literally, she begins the show stripped down," says Meghji, who has worked as an actor and entertainment reporter for TV's eTalk.

"She's exposed, vulnerable and forced to look at herself and tell us what she likes about her body. Then it's all about accentuating the best, and dressing the rest."

It can be quite an emotional ride for participating women, many of whom suffer from serious long-term self-image issues. In the premiere episode, for instance, a single Toronto mother recounts the sad story of being called "fat and ugly" by her mother.

Zain Meghji hosts the new W makeover series How To Look Good Naked Canada.

Meghji says many participants don't have full length mirrors and haven't looked at themselves in years. "Some women don't even know what they look like. They're making up a story without even looking.

"You gotta look! You gotta accept!"

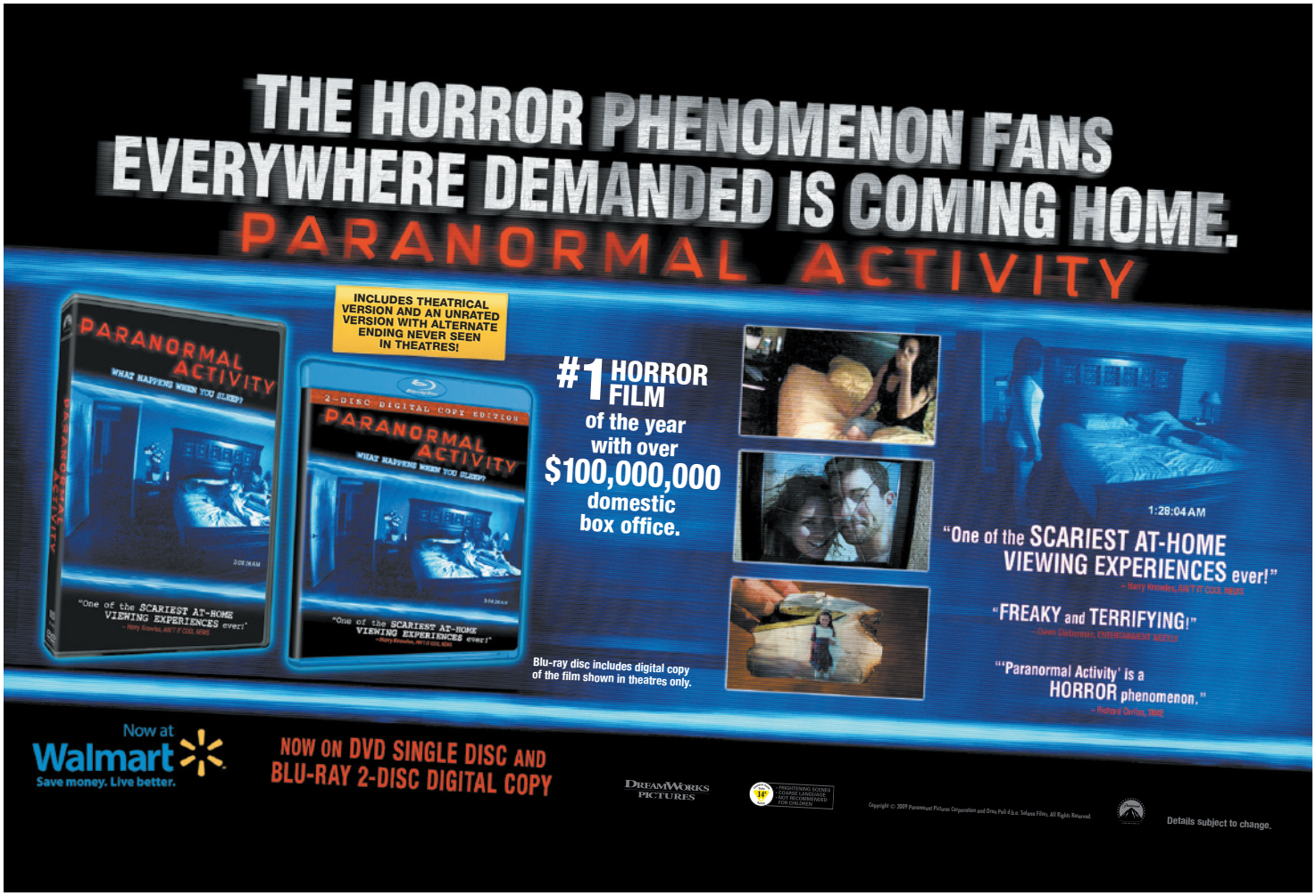
Not that the show is always successful. Meghji says many participants do feel truly better about themselves by the end of the series. Some … not so much.

"Each woman reacts differently. Some go through it and say — I'm forever changed. But you wonder — are they really?" he says.

"Some you can see in their eyes that they have changed. And some women are resistant even when it's done."

On TV

- Episodes one and two of How To Look Good Naked Canada premieres tomorrow night on W.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DREAMWORKS PICTURES
Details subject to change.

Animal Collective tops HMV poll
Music critics have voted U.S. psychedelic dance act Animal Collective's record Merriweather Post Pavilion the album of the year. The New York-based indie band topped HMV's annual "poll of polls" for 2009. **ANANOVA.COM**

The Good Wife tries to forgive

Hit TV show explores scandal, infidelity

IAN JOHNSTON
for Metro Canada

"These incidents of famous men cheating on their wives keep happening. I read today where it was suggested that the thing Tiger's wife should do is to appear beside him in a show of support. Again, that's our show." Christine Baranski

Christine Baranski plays a lawyer on the hit TV show The Good Wife.

The makers of The Good Wife owe something of a debt to Tiger Woods' ongoing personal troubles.

"Honestly, it was suggested we should send him flowers," says actress Christine Baranski (Cybil, Mamma Mia, Chicago).

"Since we shot the pilot, these incidents of famous men cheating on their wives keep happening. I read today where it was suggested that the thing Tiger's wife should do is to appear beside him in a show of support. Again, that's our show."

The Good Wife stars Julianna Marguilies as Alicia, the wife of disgraced politician Peter Florrick (Chris Noth), who is caught in a corruption/hooker scandal that puts him in jail. Humiliated, Alicia is forced back to work as a lawyer under the tutelage of Diane Lockhart (Baranski).

A hit for CBS, the show effectively taps into that oft-debated tabloid question — if your spouse humiliated you in public, would you still stand by him?

"You're certainly not going to get an answer out of me on that," says Baranski. "It's that question that keeps the show interesting. Would you try to keep the marriage alive? Could you live with him?"

The Emmy-winning Baranski says her Good Wife character is still a work-in-progress.

"Early on, the show had to concentrate on the main character and her dilemma. So my character didn't get a lot of time to develop," she says.

"I didn't want her to be the obvious bitch-boss. And I think the writers are doing a good job of defining the character and easing me into the part."

The Good Wife returns with new episodes tomorrow night on Global.

Beyond The Good Wife, Baranski recently recreated her role as Leonard's mom on the hit sitcom The Big Bang Theory — even locking lips with everyone's favourite pretentious brainiac Sheldon (Jim Parsons).

"It's a fantastically original show. So funny. So it was a pleasure," she says.

As for the future of The Good Wife, Baranski doesn't fear her much-hyped timeslot competition — The Jay Leno Show.

"No worries," she laughs.

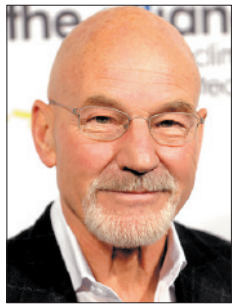
Stewart receives knighthood

There's an especially starry knight in Britain's latest round of royal honours.

Patrick Stewart — Star Trek: The Next Generation's Capt. Jean-Luc Picard — becomes Sir Patrick in Queen Elizabeth II's New Year honours list, which also includes a knighthood for theatre and film director Nicholas Hytner.

"This is an honour that embraces those actors, directors and creative teams who have in these recent years helped fill my life with inspiration, companionship and sheer fun," said 69-year-old Stewart, who recently returned to the British stage following a long career in Hollywood that included playing Professor Charles Xavier in three X-Men films.

Erich Reich, a refugee from Nazi-occupied Europe who organized last year's 70th anniversary of the Kindertransport, which brought 10,000 children to wartime Britain, also received a knighthood.


Patrick Stewart

A separate honours list in New Zealand bestowed a knighthood on the king of Middle Earth — Lord of the Rings filmmaker Peter Jackson.

Jackson, 53, was knighted in New Zealand, his native land and the filming location for the trilogy, which collected 17 Academy Awards. The New Zealand award is approved by the queen, the country's head of state.

Jackson is currently working on the two-movie prequel The Hobbit, also based on a book by J.R.R. Tolkien, with Mexican director Guillermo del Toro.

In Britain, lesser honours went to Rick Parfitt and Francis Rossi of the rock group Status Quo. They were named Officers of the Order of the British Empire, or OBE, in recognition of a four-decade, three-chord career that has seen them score 64 British hit singles, including Rockin' All Over the World.

Parfitt, 61, said he'd given up hope of an honour because of his wild past.

"If they'd reviewed some of my old newspaper cuttings!" he said.

Phyllida Lloyd, who directed Mamma Mia! — the most financially successful British film of all time — was named Commander of the Order of the British Empire, or CBE.

CBEs also went to artist Maggi Hambling and Olivier Award-winning actress Margaret Tyzack.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Obama watched Avatar
President Barack Obama's family spent part of the last day of 2009 watching the futuristic adventure film Avatar. The Obamas visited a movie theatre near their rented vacation home in Hawaii on Thursday morning for a screening of the 3-D hit. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Metro's picks to become Oscar flicks

10 films that will surely get a look from the Academy this year

PHIL BROWN
for Metro Canada

The Academy Awards are fast approaching, so it's time for everyone to chime in with their thoughts about which films are bound for Oscar glory. With that in mind, we present a list of ten films we think will be eligible for little gold statues.

UP IN THE AIR This melancholic comedy is the film of the moment. The satirical examination of a man who fires people for a living and lives through his blackberry might not age well, but it will get plenty of attention this year.

THE HURT LOCKER Action specialist Kathryn Bigelow (Point Break) surprised critics and audiences with arguably the finest film made about the Iraq war. The movie has been cleaning up the critic's awards and is sure to do well with the typically left-wing Academy.

UP Pixar has been collecting best animated film Oscars for years and is the frontrunner in 2009 as well (although Coraline deserves serious attention). Don't be surprised if the film also scores a well-deserved best picture nod and possibly even wins.

INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS Most other years Quentin Tarantino's bizarre reinvention of the Second World War probably wouldn't be in the running, but with 10 best picture spots available there's no way this get won't get attention. Christoph Waltz's name should have been printed on a statue for his unforgettable Nazi back in August.

PRECIOUS This Toronto International Film Festival Audience Award winner about a troubled young girl might not be easy to watch, but has been the subject of Oscar predictions ever since the Toronto premiere. The film won't take away the big prize, but it is practically guaranteed a nomination and will probably bring home a statue for Mo'nique (who could have predicted that?).

AVATAR The last time James Cameron made the most expensive movie of all time he declared himself the king of the world on the Oscar stage. That won't happen this year, but the surprisingly effective Avatar should sneak in with a best picture nomination and will deservingly dominate the technical categories.

AN EDUCATION This charmingly British coming-of-age tale about a university-bound private school girl and a mysterious older man might not be groundbreaking, but warm and safe issue movies like this tend to win over the Academy. Nominations for Alfred Molina's scene stealing supporting turn and Carey Mulligan's captivating lead performance are assured.

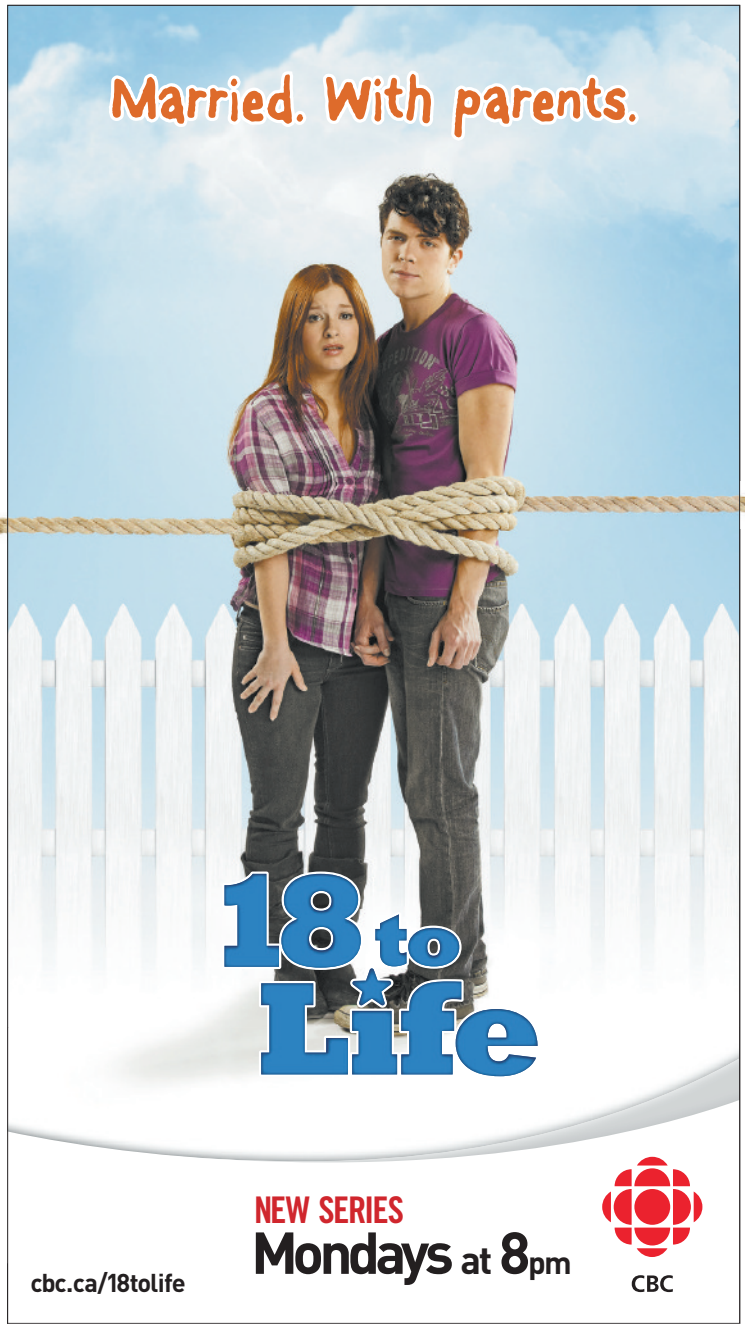
THE WHITE RIBBON Michael Haneke's tense and difficult black and white allegory won the top prize at Cannes this year and should be considered the front-runner for the foreign language film statue (if Haneke doesn't scare off the voters again). It deserves best picture consideration too, but that won't happen.

A SERIOUS MAN The Coen Brothers scored again with one of their most bizarre, hilarious, and oddly personal films to date. In the past the Coens would have been ignored, but after the No Country For Old Men sweep they have become Oscar darlings and should be recognized for this unconventional, but deserving film.

DISTRICT 9 This intelligent and action-packed sci-fi flick isn't an obvious Oscar contender, but is one of the best films of 2009. It has more to say about South Africa that the clumsy Invictus and will pop up in the screenplay and effects categories even if it doesn't get nominated for the big prize.

Brad Pitt stars in the Quentin Tarantino-directed Inglourious Basterds.

James Cameron's Avatar will get looks by the Academy this year.



Movie industry surviving the recession

RICHARD CROUSE
for Metro Canada

MONEY For a year when "bailout" and "layoff" became buzzwords in everyday conversation there was good news in Hollywood.

Attendance at U.S. theatres actually increased by five per cent in 2009 and research firm OTX reported consumers ranked movie going as the best value for their entertainment dollar.

That's the good news, but even though movie money doesn't seem to be in short supply it isn't business as usual in Tinsel Town. The average moviegoer, however, probably won't see a difference.

"In the end I don't think the consumers will notice the difference at all," says MovieCityNews.com editor David Poland.

"It's gotten to the point that there are so many studio movies in any given week there is often a lost movie or two. Customers may find it a little less frustrating (next year) because there may be fewer titles being advertised and fewer titles that make them think 'I wish I could have gone to that if it was still in the theatres three weeks after I first saw the ad.'"

The business, however, is changing. The buzzwords of the biz is "risk displacement."

"My sense isn't that lower budget or riskier movies will dry up; instead, I see the big budget and low budget films continuing, but the middle dropping out," says Cameron Bailey, co-director of the Toronto International Film Festival.

"Paramount's recently announced start-up of an ultra low-budget digital division on the heels of Paranormal Activity is one sign. Avatar is another.

What I think we'll see much less of is the $15-$40 million star-driven drama, the kind that wins awards."

2009 confirmed Bailey's theory.

Among the victims of downsizing were the $30 million Cate Blanchett vehicle Indian Summer and a film adaptation of Shakespeare's King Lear, starring Anthony Hopkins, Gwyneth Paltrow, Naomi Watts and Keira Knightley.

"I don't like that hollowing out sound I hear in the industry," says Bailey, "and I hope it's just a stage in an ongoing evolution."

Rap producer up on murder charge
Music producer Demetrius Lee Stewart, known as Shawty Redd, is being held in a suburban Atlanta jail on a murder charge. Stewart is accused of shooting 35-year-old Damon A. Martin of Detroit in an argument at Stewart's home. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Accidently on Purpose finding an audience

Montreal native speaks about his big hollywood break and the success of the suddenly popular comedy

IAN JOHNSTON
for Metro Canada

For Montrealer Nicolas Wright, the big Hollywood break came almost too late.

"It was really last minute. Like the last week of pilot season. The last year of my (work) Visa," says Wright, who plays the lovable slacker Davis in the CBS/City-TV comedy Accidentally on Purpose with Jenna Elfman.

"Several times I'd gotten to the point where it was me or some other guy and then not got the part. I got some good feedback, but I was exhausted by the whole process. But somehow, thru the grace of whatever, I got this one."

Not an immediate hit, Accidentally On Purpose looked like it might be a fall TV casualty. But then, for whatever reason, its audience began to grow, earning an order from the network for more.

"We weren't a breakout hit or anything, so in some ways it really feels like we earned it," says Wright, 27, who is best known to Canadians as the hopelessly neurotic film maker Rufus Marquez on the hit IFC/TMN series The Festival, later redubbed The Business.

Nicholas Wright stars in Accidently on Purpose.

"I'm not sure it (Accidentally On Purpose) ever got to the point where it was going to be cancelled. But if the viewers keep going down, it sure isn't a good trend. I think we're really hitting our stride now and people are starting to tune in."
Nicolas Wright

"I'm not sure it (Accidentally On Purpose) ever got to the point where it was going to be cancelled. But if the viewers keep going down, it sure isn't a good trend. I think we're really hitting our stride now and people are starting to tune in."

Wright's Accidentally character is best described as the comedy sidekick to Zack (Jon Foster) who, as the sitcom story goes, is having a baby with the much-older Elfman.

"Davis is sorta this leach whose there to keep the mood up — he's there to entertain,"

But though he's now seen by millions every week, Wright says he rarely gets recognized.

"Maybe once. I got recognized for a Tim Horton's commercial I did, which got played to death. I remember some guy at Subway suddenly looking up and doing my line from the commercial. What can I say? You got me dude."

Accidentally On Purpose airs Mondays.

Must-see mid-season TV

PREVIEWS It's been a pretty good fall season, but really, in some ways it doesn't compare to what's coming ahead at mid-season.

From highly anticipated returning series, new shows and the return of some big-ticket shows that the networks knew they could make us wait for, it's going to be an incredibly busy few months.

What follows is a quick chronological look at some series that we're looking forward too:

THE SIMPSONS (Sundays, Global and Fox, premieres Jan. 10): Celebrating their 20th year on the air, this episode is also their 450th, and really, it's going to more of the same wackiness.

The first episode is also followed by an hour-long 20th Anniversary special.

All we can say, obviously in our best Monty Burns voice: Excellent.

HOUSE (Global and Fox, premieres Jan. 11): Okay, so let's see, someone comes in with an unsolvable medical issue that no one but House can solve.

He's a total jerk and consistently comes up with solutions that only make the patient worse.

Then as we approach 8:50 p.m EST., voila, problem solved. That is every House episode ever aired, and it's still the number one show in Canada, so they're doing something right.

CHUCK (Sundays 9 p.m., Citytv and NBC, premieres Jan. 10): Zachary Levi's nerd goes ninja in the third season of this series, as Chuck can now upload skills as opposed to just information with the Intersect.
This means that we're sure he's going to be kicking some ass as opposed to watching others do it for him. Cool guest stars remain on tap.

24 (premieres Sunday Jan. 17): In keeping with their timely tradition, this series starts off with two back-to-back nights of two hour episodes to get you hooked, then moves to its regular Monday timeslot on Jan. 25.

In the opening minutes we see something we've never seen before — Jack happy!

Don't worry, it doesn't last.

LOST (premieres Feb. 2): What time is it?

Heck, what reality is it? We have no idea what world we're returning to after Juliet exploded that space-time shattering nuclear device but it's going to be riveting seeing what happens in this final season of this cult show.

It's a special two-hour kick off which we're sure will leave us equally delighted and utterly confused.

Whatever way you slice it, in the cold winter ahead, there will be plenty to keep your eyes on.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

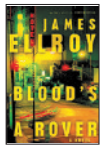
Castro's Saturday wedding

Jason Castro is a married man, according to tweets from guests at his wedding Saturday. The 22-year-old dreadlocked singer-songwriter, who finished fourth on Season 7 of American Idol, wed girlfriend Mandy Mayhall in his hometown near Dallas. PEOPLE.COM

Ellroy shows the dark '60s

Blood's **A Rover**

Author: James Ellroy
Publisher: Knopf
Price: $35 (Hardcover)



FROM THE HEIST that opens this entertaining novel, Blood's A Rover takes readers on a thrilling ride through 1960s America. Completing James Ellroy's Underworld USA Trilogy after American Tabloid and The Cold Six Thousand, this book follows three central protagonists tied to dark back-stories of characters like aviator Howard Hughes and FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, and groups like the mob and the CIA. Written in Ellroy's highly stylized tone, the book captures an equally outstanding and gritty portrait of a country undergoing change.

BookPicks

L.A. **Noir**

Author: John Buntin
Publisher: Crown
Price: $32 (Hardcover)

GOVERNING MAGAZINE writer John Buntin presents a fantastic, well-rounded and researched account of Los Angeles' history between the 1920s and '60s, presenting the metropolis as a true vice city. The chronicle relays the biographies of two seeming opposites, related by outsider status: William Parker, LAPD chief and law enforcement reformer, and mobster Mickey Cohen.

Last Night In **Twisted River**

Author: John Irving
Publisher: Random House
Price: $34.95 (Hardcover)

NEW HAMPSHIRE'S Androscoggin River is the symbolic title body that flows through the pages of American novelist John Irving's latest. Opening in the mid-1950s, Last Night In Twisted River follows Dominic Baciagulpo and his son Danny, employed in a logging camp kitchen. A water death that opens the novel and subsequent accidental killing urge the father and son to flee the camp, escaping to Massachusetts, Vermont, Iowa and Ontario over the book's 50-year span. The novel can be haphazard in plot but remains in Irving's style.

Brian Coulton/for Metro Canada

Griffin's vulgar quip on CNN

CONTROVERSY For the second straight year, comedian Kathy Griffin ushered in the new year by saying something vulgar on CNN.

During the network's live New Year's Eve broadcast from Times Square, Griffin was joking with co-host Anderson Cooper about how to pronounce the first name of "balloon boy" Falcon Heene when she mumbled something that sounded a little like "Falcon" and a lot like the F-word. Cooper hung his head, shook it and said "You're terrible," before resuming his banter.

The network said in a statement Friday that it "regrets that profanity was used during our New Year's Eve coverage."

During the same show a year ago, Griffin gleefully shouted at a heckler in the crowd and made a joke implying that the man performed gay sex acts for a living.

Kathy Griffin

In a statement released by her publicist Friday, Griffin made light of the "balloon boy" joke: "Like every other serious reporter covering the now infamous balloon boy hoax, I struggled to pronounce his name Falcon correctly and have gotten a kick out of how many ways I've heard it pronounced by other serious reporters. Just add me to that list and happy new year!"

Asked whether Griffin would be invited back next year, CNN spokeswoman Shimrit Sheetrit said planning for the 2011 celebration hadn't yet begun. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Kenya's**Style**

Kenya Hunt

Exclusively at metronews.ca/globalstyle

Entertainment in brief

ARREST Police say a man who appeared in a Discovery Channel reality show about crab fishing off Alaska is wanted for three bank robberies and has been arrested. Police in Illinois say they arrested 23-year-old Joshua Tel Warner early Thursday on the Oregon bank robbery warrant after a vehicle he was riding in was pulled over for a routine traffic stop. He was being held on $30,000 bail in the Tazewell County Jail. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Box office

Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theatres, according to The Associated Press:

1. **Avatar:** $75 million US
2. **Sherlock Holmes:** $65.4 million
3. **Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Squeakquel:** $50.2 million
4. **It's Complicated:** $22.1 million
5. **Up in the Air:** $11.8 million
6. **The Blind Side:** $11.7 million
7. **The Princess and the Frog:** $8.7 million
8. **Nine:** $5.5 million
9. **Did You Hear About the Morgans?:** $5 million
10. **Invictus:** $4.4 million

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

For complete online movie listings, trailers, reviews and tickets, visit: metronews.ca/movies

VA	Vu	SC	C	7:00	7:30	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30	11:00
primetime 1/4/10	251	308	3 CBC	Wheel Fortune	Jeopardy! (N)	18 to Life	Little Mosque	Winnipeg Comedy		CBC News: The National (N)		(:05) The Hour
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	250	321	9 CTV	etalk (CC)	Access H.	Law & Order (CC)		Two/Half Men	Big Bang Th	CSI: Miami "Out of Time"		CTV News
	-	-	10 JOY	Frasier (CC)	The Insider	Daily Weekend Edition (CC)		Poltergeist: The Legacy		P3	Ek Noor	New Day
	252	336	11 GTV	Entertainment	ET Canada	Heroes Claire is suspicious of Samuel. (N) (CC)				Drop Dead Diva "Pilot" (CC)		News
	256	389	12 VI	Degrassi	TMZ (N) (CC)	Meet Joe Black ★★ (1998, Fantasy) Brad Pitt, Anthony Hopkins, Claire Forlani. (CC)						A News (N)
	253	359	13 CITY	The Office	The Office	The Bachelor: On the Wings of Love (Season Premiere) (N)				The Jay Leno Show (N) (CC)		The CityNews
	-	-	14 CW	The Office	The Office	One Tree Hill (CC)		Gossip Girl (CC)		Seinfeld	Seinfeld	Frasier (CC)
	289	381	15 CBS	Entertainment	The Insider	How I Met	Accidentally	Two/Half Men	Big Bang Th	CSI: Miami "Out of Time"		KIRO 7 News
	287	379	16 NBC	Evening Mag.	Inside Edition	Heroes Claire is suspicious of Samuel. (N) (CC)				The Jay Leno Show (N) (CC)		KING 5 News
	602	568	19 W	Supernanny "Jeans Family"		Dine With Me	How Clean Is	Love It or List It "Shanahan"		Love It or List It		Confidential
	288	380	21 ABC	Wheel Fortune	Jeopardy! (N)	The Bachelor: On the Wings of Love (Season Premiere) (N)				(:02) Conveyor Belt of Love		KOMO 4 News
	-	-	23 KVOS	M*A*S*H	Seinfeld	Hamburger Hill ★★ (1987, War) Anthony Barrile.				Seinfeld	King	Cheers (CC)
	291	383	27 PBS	Conver-KCTS	Antiques	Antiques Roadshow (CC)		This Emotional Life Relationships and emotional well-being.				Steves Europe
	290	382	28 FOX	College Football: Tostitos Fiesta Bowl				Postgame	Family Guy	Q13 FOX News at Ten (N)		Family Guy
	-	364	43 PBS	(6:00) This Emotional Life		Being Served	Keeping Up	Tavis Smiley	Charlie Rose (N) (CC)		Antiques Roadshow (CC)	
	296	654	54 SBK	Frasier (CC)	Frasier (CC)	The Office	Name Is Earl	South Park	Half & Half	Paid Program	Street Court	Cold Files
	298	653	55 TLA	Two/Half Men	Two/Half Men	One Tree Hill (CC)		Gossip Girl (CC)		KTLA 5 News at 10 (N) (CC)		Friends (CC)
	295	651	56 WGN	WGN News at Nine (N) (CC)		Family Guy	Two/Half Men	According-Jim	Friends (CC)	Friends (CC)	Maury Lie-detector tests.	
	297	652	57 WPX	PIX News at Ten Tong. (N)		Two/Half Men	Friends (CC)	Friends (CC)	According-Jim	Family Guy	South Park	Scrubs (CC)
	199	311	76 STR	CTV News	NTV Latenight News		Late Show W/Letterman		Late Late Show/Ferguson		Inside Edition	Seinfeld
news	502	390	29 NW	Beatles Rocked the Kremlin		CBC News: The National (N)		CBC News: The National (N)		Beatles Rocked the Kremlin		National
	500	500	33 CNN	Anderson Cooper 360 (CC)				Larry King Live		Anderson Cooper 360 (CC)		Cooper 360
sports	407	419	22 RSP	Skiing	Hockey	Hockey	PartyPoker.net		MMA Conn	Sportsnet Connected (Live)		Sportsnet
	400	400	30 TSN	SportsCentre	That's Hockey	SportsCentre	Hockey 2010 World Under 17 Hockey Challenge: Teams TBA. (Taped) (CC)					SportsCentre
	411	457	49 OLN	Ghost Hunters (CC)		Destination Truth (CC)		Operate-Repo	Operate-Repo	Ghost Hunters (CC)		Ghost Hunters
	410	403	54 SCR	WWE Monday Night RAW		Score Now	Score Now	WWE Monday Night RAW With Michael Cole and Jerry Lawler.				Cabby Unlimit
	417	406	55 SC	Barrett-Jackson		Car Crazy	Pass Time	SuperCars	SuperCars	Barrett-Jackson		Auctions
	416	409	144 GLF	(6:00) Fútbol Brasileño		Off the Pitch	Gol TV News	Off the Pitch	Game Cap	Paid Program	Gol TV News	Gol TV News
family	552	543	25 YTV	Scorpion	Scorpion	Malcolm-Mid.	Hates Chris	8 Rules	What I Like	Family Biz (N)	To Be Indie	Prank Patrol
	555	545	50 TEL	Scooby-Doo	Total Drama	Total Drama	6TEEN	Futurama	King of Hill	American Dad	Futurama	Chicken
	557	541	51 FAM	Sonny Chance	Suite Life	Overruled!	Han. Montana	Wizards-Place	Latest Buzz	Ned's School	Cory in House	That's-Raven
	553	546	53 TRE	Babar (CC)	Big & Small	Max & Ruby	Dragon	Backyard	Ni Hao	Go, Diego, Go!	(:35) Franklin	Comfy Couch
cable variety	268	354	5 KNO	Recreat. Eden	Landscape	Monarchy "Rule Britannia"		Eileen Gray: Invitation		Forgetful Not Forgotten		Park Reserve
	575	583	20 CMT	Broken Bridges ★ (2006, Drama) Toby Keith, Kelly Preston, Burt Reynolds.					Broken Bridges ★ (2006, Drama) Toby Keith, Kelly Preston.			
	570	580	24 MM	Video on Trial	Video on Trial	MuchOnDemand (CC)		America's Best Dance Crew		MuchVibe		Spotlight
	600	564	29 H&G	House	House	Holmes on Homes (CC)		Marriage	Income Prop.	For Rent	My First Place	House
	615	520	31 A&E	Hoarders "Deborah; Jim" (N)		Hoarders "Chris and Dale"		(:01) Intervention (CC)		(:01) Intervention "Sarah"		(:01) Hoarders
	628	584	32 SPKE	(5:00) TNA Wrestling (CC)		UFC Unleashed		DEA "Up the Ladder"		CSI: Crime Scene Invstgtn.		Trek: Voyager
	521	560	34 TLC	World Chocolate		Little People	Little People	Cake Boss	Cake Boss	World Chocolate		Little People
	616	522	39 SHO	Relic Hunter (CC)		The Suspect (2005, Suspense) Jamie Luner. (CC)				Bones (CC)		NCIS (CC)
	620	523	40 BVO	Altered by Elvis (CC)		Law & Order "Blue Bamboo"		Without a Trace (CC)		Wordplay ★★★ (2006, Documentary) (CC)		
	601	562	41 SLC	How To Make Love-Wife		ET Canada	What	Real Housewives of Jersey		Real Housewives OC		Runway
	520	505	42 DIS	Dirty Jobs "Glass Maker" (N)		Discovery: 15 Years		MythBusters (CC)		Dirty Jobs "Glass Maker"		Man vs. Wild
	522	506	44 HIS	(6:00) Dogfights Dogfighting.		Greatest Tank Battles (CC)		Lost Worlds (CC)		Shockwave (CC)		Tank Battles
	627	528	45 SPC	(5:00) X2: X-Men United (2003)		(7:50) Alien Siege ★★ (2005) Brad Johnson.				(:45) X2: X-Men United ★★★ (2003) Patrick Stewart. (CC)		
	294	650	47 TBS	Family Guy	Family Guy	Lopez Tonight		Name Is Earl	Name Is Earl	Sex and-City	Sex and-City	Lopez Tonight
	619	525	48 TROP	Re-Vamped (CC)		Parking Wars	Parking Wars	Flipping Out (N) (CC)		Launch My Line (N) (CC)		Prod. Parker
	603	561	52 FN	Pitchin' In	Glutton	Restaurant Makeover (CC)		Diner, Drive-In	Unwrapped	Top Chef Masters (CC)		Pitchin' In
	-	-	53 AMC	League	Cutthroat Island ★★ (1995) Geena Davis, Matthew Modine. Premiere.					Alien Resurrection ★★ (1997) (CC)		
	626	547	57 COM	Air Farce	22 Minutes	Corner Gas	Name Is Earl	The Simpsons	South Park	The Red Green Story		Daily Show
	320	621	60 CEN	(6:20) Breakfast With Scot		Dexter "Remains to Be Seen"		Californication	Lock 'n Load	Outlander ★★ (2008) James Caviezel. (CC)		
	581	566	101 MTV	Super Sweet	Teen Cribs	MTV Live	After	Real World-Road Rules		Super Sweet	Teen Cribs	MTV Live
	261	394	102 V	Unscripted	Archaeologist	Poltergeist: The Legacy		The Cotton Club ★★★ (1984, Musical) Richard Gere, Gregory Hines. (CC)				
	-	-	105 MUL	Sewing Maid	Boys Over Flo	State Secret		To Be Announced		Pinoy: That's Entertainment		Patrol World

critics'corner

Heroes
As Claire (Hayden Panettiere) becomes immersed in the world of the carnival, she becomes increasingly suspicious of Samuel's (Robert Knepper) motives. Hiro (Masi Oka) goes on a mission to rescue one of his own. H.R.G. (Jack Coleman) recruits Matt (Greg Grunberg) to help him take down Samuel. Sylar (Zachary Quinto) returns to the carnival in search of answers in "Upon This Rock/Let It Bleed." 5 PM on STR, 8 PM on NBC GTV

The Bachelor: On the Wings of Love
Airline pilot Jake Pavelka, who was rejected by Bachelorette Jillian Harris, gets a chance to hand out the roses himself in the 14th edition of the romantic reality series. Pavelka had viewers swooning when, of his own accord, he returned to the show even after Harris had rejected him to protect her from some unsuitable candidates, prompting a grass-roots fan campaign to make him the next Bachelor. 8 PM on ABC, CITY

O'Donnell dating again

Rosie O'Donnell is no longer single. The comedian is now dating Tracy Kachtick-Anders, a Texas-based artist, O'Donnell's rep confirmed to People magazine. **POPEATER.COM**

Young love and big expectations

18 to Life takes light-hearted look at teen marriage

CBC PHOTO

Peter Keleghan, from left to right, Ellen David, Michael Seater, Stacey Farber, Alain Goulem, and Angela Asher star in the new series 18 to Life, Mondays at 8 p.m. on CBC.

In the new CBC-TV sitcom 18 to Life, Michael Seater plays Tom Bellow, a gangly, charmingly ordinary 18-year-old who finds himself engaged to his neighbour after proposing in a game of truth or dare.

Catch 18 to Life on CBC tonight

It's not exactly a situation to which the 22-year-old actor can personally relate.

"At 18, I think I had my first serious girlfriend, one of like two that I've had. I'm definitely not anywhere near being ready to commit to a marriage, let alone a relationship," the Toronto native told The Canadian Press in a recent telephone interview.

"When I was 12, my sister got married at 22 and I thought, 'She's a full-grown adult.' Now that I'm 22? I'm like, that is ... crazy. At 18, I couldn't even imagine it."

But it doesn't take much for Seater's character to pop the question to his childhood friend (and more recently, his girlfriend), Jessie Hill, played by Degrassi alum Stacey Farber.

There's no pregnancy or other plot contrivance dragging the teens to the altar in the pilot of 18 to Life, which airs today (CBC, 8 p.m. ET). Simply put, the characters just love one another, which appealed to Farber.

"I can't imagine being married right now," the 22-year-old Toronto native said. "But I think it's a really sweet idea. And I like that they get married out of love and not because Jessie's pregnant or something like that."

The show is also about the couple's different-as-can-be parents, who become reluctant in-laws.

Seater's character's parents (played by veteran actors Peter Keleghan and Ellen David) are stern and conservative, and fume with disbelief at the news of the engagement.

Farber's character, meanwhile, lives with an almost imposingly liberal pair (Al Goulem and Angela Asher), whose hippy-dippy easygoing attitude (they even offer to lend the fledgling couple their copy of the Kama Sutra) obscures their own deep disapproval of the union — pretty much the only thing they share with their hated neighbours.

Over the course of 12 first-season episodes (the pilot was shot in 2008 in Montreal, with filming for the rest of the first season occurring over the summer), the three couples are thrown together in a variety of situations, while Farber and Seater's newlyweds navigate their transition into adulthood. Still, the tone remains fairly breezy, with an eye for that sweet spot between embarrassment and laughs.

"I'm definitely not anywhere near being ready to commit to a marriage, let alone a relationship."
Michael Seater

The actors hope that the show delves further into humiliating humour in the future.

"Tom and Jessie are often the straight men in the show, because the parents are so wacky," Farber said. "So when I have an episode where I get to be ridiculous, that's more fun for me as an actor.

"I usually do have an issue with it initially, but that's just nerves. Then once we're on set and we shoot it and I see a finished product, since I've just been watching a few of the episodes, I'm usually happy with the more awkward episodes."

Added Seater: "If anything, sometimes I wish I had taken more risks and gone a bit bigger with stuff." **THE CANADIAN PRESS**

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Crowds cheer Twain as she carries Olympic flame

Thousands braved a bitterly cold New Year's Day in the northern Ontario city of Timmins to watch a country music star take her turn as an Olympic torchbearer.

Shania Twain carried the torch the final 400 metres into Hollinger Park, cheered on by thousands of parka-clad fans who turned out to see the hometown hero in person.

On the web

• Follow the Olympic torch's journey with an interactive map at metronews.ca/sports.

After making her final turn towards the stage, Twain paused, held the torch aloft in her mittened left hand, and waved to the crowd — all while flashing a radiant smile.

She then bounded the final few metres onto the stage, where she lit the Olympic cauldron.

"I feel proud, very proud," Twain told her fans.

"It's a highlight of my life to be able to carry the flame, to light the cauldron."

Those who turned out for Twain's run probably wished they too had a searing hot flame as the early evening windchill was making it feel like -39 C.

It was so cold that when the celebration's MC tossed about a dozen red beach balls into the crowd, only minutes before Twain's arrival, the balls came apart within seconds.

Despite the arctic temperatures, Twain told a cheering crowd it was "beautiful" to be back in northern Ontario.

"I know that sounds crazy, but it wouldn't be Timmins if it wasn't 40 below (with) the windchill factor!" she said.

An international superstar and five-time Grammy winner, Twain was born in Windsor, Ont., but spent most of her youth in Timmins, honing her talents by performing in local bars and clubs.

Her 1997 record Come on Over has sold more than 34 million copies, making it the bestselling album by a female artist of all time and winning her fans around the globe. Her many hits include You're Still the One, I'm Gonna Getcha Good, Party for Two, and That Don't Impress Me Much.

Mayor Tom Laughren said the size of the crowd showed just how much residents appreciated their homegrown star.

"We just want to thank you, Shania, for being so gracious to do the last leg for us," he told Twain. **THE CANADIAN PRESS**

Passing the torch

• The Shania Twain Centre has a new addition to its exhibits, thanks to its namesake. The singer donated her Olympic torch and clothing to the centre in Timmins, Ont., on Saturday. Twain says one addition makes her torch unique — she put hockey tape on the base of her torch so she wouldn't drop it. Twain carried the torch through Timmins on New Year's Day.

Shania Twain

It's going to be called *Solteras*
Jennifer Aniston has big plans for the new year, and they don't involve acting. "If all goes well I hope to open a Mexican restaurant in New York City in 2010," Aniston tells the Daily Mirror. METRO WORLD NEWS

Celebrity Buzz

Elton John helps Eminem battle drugs

HE WON'T LET THE SUN GO DOWN ON HIM Elton John is there for Eminem, who is battling a drug problem, people.com reports.

"I've been helping Eminem over the last 18 months and he's doing brilliantly," John says, reports the British Press Association.

Speaking to BBC Radio 5 in the U.K. on Saturday, John, 62, who has freely spoken about his own past issues with substance abuse, said: "I'm there if people want my help. If people ask for help you tell them where to go but there's no point advising people if they don't want to do it."

In May, Eminem admitted he'd suffered from a devastating drug addiction that led to him downing as many as 20 Vicodin, Ambien and Valium in a day.

"The numbers got so high," he told Vibe magazine, "I don't even know what I was taking."

Following his first stint in rehab in 2005, the rapper, 37, said he nearly overdosed after an acquaintance gave him unidentified blue pills, which a doctor later told him were actually methadone.

METRO NEWS SERVICES

Attorney: Police won't drop Sheen charges

'UH, JUDGE JUDY, THERE'S A GUY NAMED CHARLIE ON LINE ONE...' Brooke Mueller may want to drop the restraining order made against husband Charlie Sheen after their Christmas Morning row, but prosecutors likely don't need her help to go after the Two and a Half Men star since her initial accusations were so serious, defense attorney Roy Black tells Good Morning America.

"There's no question they can proceed without her cooperation because they can use her statements, her 911 call," Black says. Meanwhile, sources say the troubled couple is heading for divorce court.

"Brooke's been wanting a divorce for at least two months, but she was holding out until Charlie signed a new contract," a source tells E! News.

METRO WORLD NEWS

Was Madonna behind Kate and A-Rod's breakup?

THREE STRIKES, HE'S OUT Kate Hudson ended her eight-month relationship with Alex Rodriguez because of his infatuation with ex Madonna, according to OK! Magazine. The Yankees slugger and the pop star had dated prior to he and Hudson getting together, and Hudson was reportedly irked that Rodriguez was still keeping in touch with his ex.

"Kate was mad with jealousy," a source says. "She gave A-Rod three chances to stop contacting Madonna. She said that if Madonna is what A-Rod wants, then she can have him."

METRO WORLD NEWS

Celebrity tweets

Nick Cannon heads east, Paris Hilton is baffled by the cold weather in Aspen, Jonathan Ross wants to be nicer, and Jane Fonda goes to some interesting parties.

- @NickCannon On my way to China as we speak. Hopefully I can tweet from over there! BOSS UP!
- @ParisHilton It's snowing really heavily on the mountain. I hate skiing in the snow, it's much more fun when it's a bit sunny out. I'm cold :(So brutal.
- @wossy I have decided that one of my New Years Resolutions is to stop scowling at the paparrazzi. Wish me luck.
- @Janefonda Sean Penn brought Mickey Avalon to our xmas party. He sang "Do The Jane Fonda" and I danced. Fun!!!

METRO NEWS SERVICES

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Tuesday Sunny 5°/0°
Wednesday Mainly sunny 3°/0°
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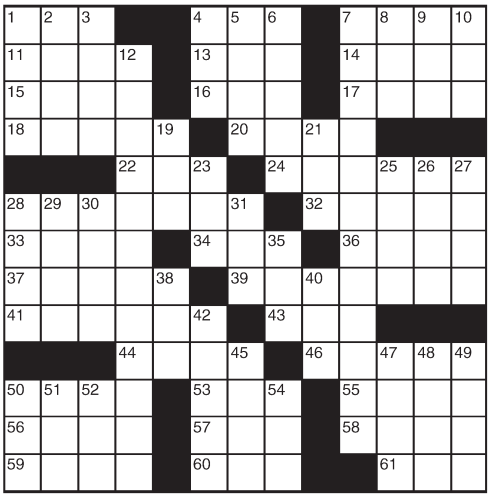
Take Five



ACROSS

1 Peculiar
4 Bikini half
7 Poet Angelou
11 Satirical comic Sahl
13 "— the ramparts ..."
14 Mid-month date
15 Celebrity
16 Witty one
17 Last year's frosh
18 Skewered entree
20 Mineral hardness scale name
22 Apprehend
24 Toy (with)
28 Sheriff
32 Did a cobbler's job
33 Composer Khachaturian
34 Catch some rays
36 Require
37 Stiff
39 Lustrous, in a way
41 Meryl Streep's alma mater
43 Hawaiian garland
44 Overly confident
46 Fake drake
50 New Zealand bird
53 Bow the head
55 Coffee
56 Reverberate
57 Raw rock
58 Mideast sultanate
59 Night light?
60 Fresh
61 Wapiti

DOWN

1 Siberian city
2 Be too fond
3 Colorless
4 Violinist's need
5 Paper quantity
6 Shop talk
7 City in Orange County, Calif.
8 Commotion
9 "Uh-huh"
10 Blond shade
12 Message
19 "Hum-bug!"
21 Storefront sign abbr.
23 Cudgel
25 Run off
26 Ogler's look
27 Vortex
28 Sportscaster Albert
29 Met melody
30 "Before," in an Alger story
31 — Vegas
35 Zero
38 Weir
40 Started
42 Talk nonstop
45 Former veep
47 Arrived
48 Elliptical
49 Tug hard
50 Trivia maven Jennings
51 Lemieux milieu
52 Which person
54 Morning moisture

Sudoku

For more/less challenging Sudoku puzzles, visit metronews.ca

HOW TO PLAY: Digits 1 through 9 will appear once in each zone – one zone is an outlined 3x3 grid within the larger puzzle grid. There are nine zones in the puzzle. Do not enter a digit into a box if it already appears elsewhere in the same zone, row across or column down the entire puzzle.

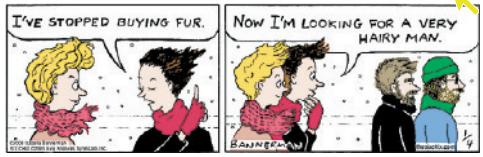
2						4	7	
	6	5			8			
		8			4	5		
5				9			2	
	8	9				7	6	
	3			5				1
		7	2			6		
			6			3	5	
	5	1						7

BOXING DAY'S CROSSWORD AND SUDOKU ANSWERS:

2	5	4	3	9	1	6	7	8
6	1	8	4	7	5	2	3	9
7	9	3	2	8	6	4	1	5
1	2	6	9	4	3	8	5	7
8	3	5	7	1	2	9	4	6
4	7	9	6	5	8	3	2	1
3	6	7	5	2	9	1	8	4
5	8	2	1	6	4	7	9	3
9	4	1	8	3	7	5	6	2

On the web

For more games and 60 additional daily cartoon strips, visit metronews.ca



Metro Recipe of the Day

Greek-style Pizza

INGREDIENTS:

2 tbsp (25 mL) olive oil
1 tsp (5 mL) balsamic vinegar
1 small red onion, thinly sliced
1 large ready-made pizza base, or two small pizza bases
3 tbsp (45 mL) sun tomato paste
8 cherry tomatoes, halved
1 3/4 oz (50 g) sun-dried tomatoes in oil, cut into thin slices
12 pitted black or green olives
5 oz (150 g) feta cheese, crumbled

METHOD:

1. Preheat oven to 425°F (220°C). Whisk 1 tbsp (15 mL) oil and vinegar in bowl, add onion rings and toss to coat. Leave while you prepare remaining ingredients.

2. Spread pizza base with sun-dried tomato paste. Arrange onion rings and cherry tomatoes on top, then scatter with sun-dried tomato slices, olives and feta cheese. Drizzle remaining oil over pizza.

3. Put pizza directly on to top shelf of oven, putting baking sheet on shelf below to catch any drips. Bake 10 minutes or until base is crisp and topping lightly browned. Season with ground black pepper. Cut into wedges and serve.

SERVES 4

rd.ca

For nutritional information on this and other great recipes, go to **rd.ca** or check out **Key Ingredients in this month's Reader's Digest, on newsstands now!**

Horoscopes by Sally Brompton sallybrompton.com

For Sally's expanded daily and weekend horoscopes, visit metronews.ca

ARIES ♈
MARCH 21-APRIL 20
You should be making plans to do with your work and your career, not only for the next few weeks but for the whole of 2010.

TAURUS ♉
APRIL 21-MAY 21
You have fixed opinions about certain issues and what happens in the wider world this coming week will confirm that you are right in your beliefs.

GEMINI ♊
MAY 22-JUNE 21
Flattery will get you everywhere today. You will know just the right thing to say to influence important people.

CANCER ♋
JUNE 22-JULY 22
What you have to say today may be important but not nearly as important as the way you choose to say it.

LEO ♌
JULY 23-AUG 23
Common sense should tell you that certain routines and methods don't work as well as they once did and need to be replaced.

VIRGO ♍
AUG 24-SEPT 22
Today's Sun-Mercury union will help you make whatever changes you think are necessary in your lifestyle, your career and your relationships.

LIBRA ♎
SEPT 23-OCT 23
It would appear that you have been taken advantage of one time too many and now you intend to turn the tables.

SCORPIO ♏
OCT 24-NOV 22
Others may be impressed by your air of self-confidence but what they don't realize is that on the inside you are trembling with fear.

SAGITTARIUS ♐
NOV 23-DEC 21
The cosmos is trying to show you that happiness comes not from having what you want in life but from wanting what you already have.

CAPRICORN ♑
DEC 22-JAN 20
A Sun-Mercury union in your sign means there is no better time to confront your doubts and fears and break their hold over you.

AQUARIUS ♒
JAN 21-FEB 18
Fate is pointing you in a certain direction and you have no alternative but to move in that direction, not in the future, but now.

PISCES ♓
FEB 19-MARCH 20
This is a good day for making plans but it is an even better day for planning things with your friends.

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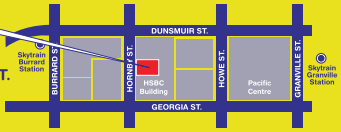

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